





# Abraham Lincoln's White House

## White House Receptions

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

### An Incident of Lincoln's First White House Reception

DURING the bitter slavery debate in Congress, just before the war between the States, it was feared by many that the Southern members would be attacked in the halls of Congress or in the streets of Washington. The fear spread to such an extent that there was located in that city an organization of one hundred Southern men, known as "Minute Men," for the sole purpose of protecting the Southern members. In this organization were two young men, close friends, both tall and commanding in appearance,—John Hatcher of Virginia, six feet and six inches in height, weighing two hundred and twenty pounds, and another from North Carolina, also above the usual height and weight.

It so happened that on the day of the inauguration of Mr. Lincoln as President, March 4, 1861, these two friends and several other members of the "Minute Men" were near the White House while the great throng of people formed in line to shake hands with the President. The one from North Carolina suggested that they fall in line and pay their respects to the new Magistrate, to which all agreed except John Hatcher, who declared that he would never shake hands with Mr. Lincoln, as he was unfriendly to the South. Mr. Hatcher was urged to go with them. He finally consented to join the line, but declared that he "would not shake the hand of old Abe Lincoln."

The other one replied: "We are going to shake hands with Mr. Lincoln; and I will wager you the finest suit of clothes to be purchased in this city that you cannot pass by Mr. Lincoln and carry out your purpose."

"Agreed," said the tall and handsome John Hatcher.

With this compact, they fell in line, John Hatcher in the lead, his head erect, and determination shown in every line of his face. As he approached Mr. Lincoln, the retiring President, Mr. Buchanan, took him by the hand, shook it cordially, and, after receiving his name, turned to introduce him to Mr. Lincoln; but, to

the surprise of Mr. Buchanan and Mr. Lincoln, John Hatcher suddenly withdrew his hand, and letting it drop to his side, began to move on without greeting Mr. Lincoln or even looking upon his face. Mr. Lincoln grasped the situation instantly, and, moving a little to the right, extended his arm in front of John Hatcher, and, with a smile, said: "No man who is taller and handsomer than I am can pass by me to-day without shaking hands with me."

It had been reported, and was thought by many to be true, that an attempt would be made to do the President bodily harm, and possibly this caused Mr. Lincoln to think that Hatcher's act was only the beginning of some trouble that was to follow.

After the young friends had left the White House, the North Carolinian said, "John, I have won the suit of clothes."

"Yes," replied John; "but who could refuse to shake hands with a man who would leave his position and put his hand in front of you and use such complimentary language as Mr. Lincoln did?"

"I have won the suit of clothes fairly," replied his friend; "but I will not take the wager, because you surrendered like a courteous Southern gentleman and shook the hand of our new President, as all Americans should do."

The inauguration over and Congress having adjourned, these two friends returned to their homes, Hatcher to the State of Virginia and the other one to North Carolina. It was not long before the war between the States began. The latter enlisted as a private in a North Carolina Regiment, and was elected a second lieutenant. John Hatcher enlisted as a private in a Virginia regiment. Two braver men never shouldered a musket or drew a sword.

Nearly two years of war passed before the friends met again. While the lines were being formed at Malvern Hill they recognized each other, our North Carolina friend as a lieutenant-colonel of infantry, the Virginian as a lieutenant in an artillery company. The latter, saluting the former, said: "We are shaking hands with Mr. Lincoln to-day very differently

from the manner in which we shook hands with him as President on the day of his inauguration in 1861." While waiting for the command to advance into one of the most sanguinary battles of the war, they talked of their hardships and narrow escapes from death. They mutually agreed that after each battle in which both were engaged, the first one that could do so would visit the other's command and ascertain the fate of his friend; and, if either should be killed or wounded, that the survivor would render the necessary assistance and inform relatives. When the battle was over, the lieutenant-colonel repaired to the camp of the artillery company and inquired after Lieutenant Hatcher. The captain of the company reported that he had been killed in the engagement and buried by his comrades.

The lieutenant-colonel fought in many a bloody battle during the war, and when he surrendered at its end he held a general's commission. He still lives, passing a quiet life among his neighbors, and is one of the most courteous and dignified of Southern gentlemen.

A young Northern man who happened to be in line at the White House near those young Southern men on that day, overheard the conversation between Mr. Lincoln and John Hatcher. He soon after entered the Federal army as a lieutenant, and fought through the war, being promoted for gallantry on several occasions, and is now a brigadier-general on the retired list, living in North Carolina, having married into one of the most prominent families of that State ten years after the war closed.

Forty years after the close of this, the bloodiest of civil wars, these two distinguished generals, who served on opposite sides, both of whom participated in the events of this sketch, live in friendship, quietly passing the evening of their days at their own firesides, having forgiven and forgotten old heart-burnings over the greatest issue that ever divided the American people.

RALEIGH, N. C.

C. B. Edwards.

*Century 1906*



**J. A. Thoman In  
Uniform of U. S.  
Cavalry In 1865**



**TELLS OF WHITE  
HOUSE RECEPTIONS**

**San Diego Man Who Was Cavalry Officer Often Shook Hands With Lincoln.**

Perhaps there are few men today living on the western coast who have survived those who in Washington during the martyred president's occupancy of the White House, often shook hands with him as he gave receptions to officers of the army and navy. Of these survivors John A. Thomas is a San Diegan, living on Fir street near the city park.

Mr. Thomas was a member of a Kentucky cavalry regiment toward the close of the civil war, when he was transferred to the battalion of the famous black horse cavalry, stationed in Washington. He says the barracks were located on K street, two blocks north of the White House. In telling of President Lincoln's receptions, Mr. Thomas said yesterday:

"President Lincoln stood in the corner of the room, while a line of generals, senators, representatives, soldiers and other army officers passed along, shaking hands with each of them. He said nothing to most of them unless it was to intimate friends. To the soldier, however, he frequently stopped to have a chat. I have shaken hands with him several times. Once he asked what state I was from, and then my name, then extending me thanks. If I remember right, the receptions were held in the east or red room, where the Marine band played.

"Such soldiers as were fortunate enough to be present were always treated with consideration and the greatest respect. Our uniforms were the regulation cavalry suits, blue jackets with yellow trimmings, and in addition we wore brass shoulder scales.

"On the death of the president our battalion rode at the head of the funeral procession. It was raining, and we wore our rubber ponchos. After Lincoln's death the cabinet officials were given mounted escorts. I was a non-commissioned officer of Secretary of War Stanton's escort. Our duty was to see him on his way between the war department and his home.

"On being discharged from the service Secretary Stanton gave me an order to retain my horse, saddle, spurs, etc. I still have the saddle and spurs, which are the same I used as a member of the funeral escort.



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## THE LINCOLNS' MOST FAMOUS WHITE HOUSE GUESTS

By Robert S. Barton  
Drawing by Harry B. Chase

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It is quite likely that of all the notable men and women who crossed the threshold of the Executive Mansion during the presidency of Abraham Lincoln the two most famous were also the two smallest. At the time of their visit they were, probably, the most widely known couple in the world. There are not a great many persons now living who ever saw them, but their pseudonyms are familiar to almost everyone (although few would recognize their real names: Charles S. Stratton and Lavinia Warren.)

Under the heading of "Local News", the following report appeared in the Washington Star, of Saturday, February 14, 1863:

### MOVEMENTS OF GEN. TOM THUMB AND LADY

"Yesterday morning, Mr. and Mrs. Stratton visited, at Arlington Heights, Mr. Benjamin Warren, the brother of the bride, who is a soldier in the 40th Massachusetts Regiment. Mrs. Stratton expressed herself strongly devoted to the Union and said she was willing her husband should volunteer if it was necessary.

"Last evening at eight o'clock the little couple visited, by invitation, at the White House, and were introduced to the President, Mrs. Lincoln, Secretaries Chase, Stanton, Welles, Blair and Usher, and Senator Wilson, Generals Butler and Clay, Hon. J. J. Crittenden, and many other gentlemen of distinction, nearly all of whom were accompanied by their families. The President, in the course of the evening, remarked to General Thumb that he had thrown him completely in the shade; that he (the General) was now the great center of attraction. Refreshments were served to the guests of the President and Mrs. Lincoln, which the little folks appeared to relish as much as any person present.



"At half past nine they left the White House and repaired to Willard's, where they received the members of the press and a few select friends. At this reception the bride and bridegroom appeared as happy as on the night before at the hop. The little lady was peculiarly communicative and witty. In an exchange of badinage with the proprietor of the hotel, Mrs. Stratton interfered, and appealed, in apparent earnestness, that Mr. C. and her husband would not come to blows. The reception continued for about an hour and a half. During the whole of the time the General and his lady kept up a spirited conversation with their guests.

"This morning the little couple took their departure, leaving the hotel in a private carriage in company with their suite, consisting of Mr. Wells, the General's agent; Mr. Pierce, his private secretary; Madame Latain, Mrs. Thumb's maid; and B. Sellors, the General's attendant - with Mr. B. Warren, the bride's brother, who is a member of the 40th Mass. Regiment, and has obtained a short leave of absence - and took the 11:15 train for Philadelphia. They will stop at her uncle's in that



city this afternoon and spend Sunday, and on Monday proceed to New York. They contemplate visiting Europe shortly."

\* \* \* \* \*

On the previous Tuesday, February 10, 1863, the wedding of the tiny couple had given New York the most exciting event of its social season. The ceremony was performed at noon, in Grace Episcopal Church, before an audience which filled the building to its capacity. Invitations (which requested full dress) had been sent to the most prominent persons in social, civil and military circles, including President and Mrs. Lincoln and members of Congress and the diplomatic corps. Without an invitation, admission to the church was impossible, and the precious bits of cardboard could have been black-marketed for as much as fifty dollars apiece. The crowd outside the church packed the streets so solidly that only the carriages of invited guests were able to get through, and the police diverted "stages and all other vehicles" to other routes.

One report names three clergymen who took part in the ceremony: Rev. Mr. Willey, of Bridgeport; Rev. Dr. Putnam, of Middleboro; and Rev. Dr. Taylor, Rector of Grace Church. Because of the diminutive size of the participants a carpeted platform was built for the ceremony, so that their heads would be higher than the chancel rail. The participants were these:

The groom: "General Tom Thumb." Charles S. Stratton was born at Bridgeport, Conn., January 11, 1838, and at the time of his marriage was actually 25 years old. (It is necessary to explain that in November, 1842, when he was discovered by Barnum and first exhibited he was not quite five years old; but Barnum advertised him as "a dwarf eleven years of age, just arrived from England." At that time the little fellow was 25 inches high and weighed 15 pounds. In later years he became rather stout, and his height reached 31 inches.)

The bride: Miss Lavinia Warren,

born in Middleboro, Mass., October 31, 1842. On her wedding day she was not quite 21 years old. Her height was 30 inches and her weight 29 pounds.

The maid of honor: Miss Minnie Warren, a younger sister of the bride, and even smaller. She, too, was born in Middleboro, on June 3, 1850. On the wedding day she was nearly 13 years of age. Her height was 24 inches and she weighed 19 pounds.

The best man: "Commodore Nutt." George Washington Morrison Nutt was born in Manchester, N.H., April 2, 1844, and at the time of the wedding was nearly 19 years old. He was 29 inches in height and weighed 24 pounds.

In all the history of circuses, museums, and the entertainment world, there has never been a quartet of mid-gets as famous as these; nor has anyone in the history of "show business" ever matched the fame of their promoter and exhibitor, Phineas Taylor Barnum, another New England Yankee, born in Bethel, Conn., July 5, 1810.

Naturally, Barnum, "The Prince of Humbug," was suspected of arranging the whole romantic affair to advertise his American Museum, where the four dwarfs were the star attraction. But, although his publicity stunts were often big and elaborate, and although he was indeed the master-mind directing every detail of the wedding arrangements, for once there was no humbug, nor was there any commercializing of the event. Barnum kept in the background, and he made sure that everything was done in good taste and with full consideration for the feelings of the bridal party. There is no doubt as to his sincerity in doing so; but neither is there any doubt that Barnum and his American Museum benefited by the publicity which the extraordinary wedding received.

A reception at the Metropolitan Hotel followed the church ceremony, and added to the day's sensations. An 80-pound wedding cake, fantastically elaborate, was eventually distributed in tiny souvenir boxes to 2000 of the more fortunate guests. Lavishly expensive gifts were on display, under guard.



They had come from celebrities, society leaders, and nearly everyone of importance. Many of the gifts had been specially made to the necessary proportions; for example: a billiard table three by six feet; a silver-plated sewing machine 26 inches high; and miniature furniture, dishes, silverware, and jewelry. Among the listed gifts was "a gorgeous set of Chinese fire-screens" from Mrs. Lincoln.

At ten o'clock that night the New York Excelsior Band serenaded the couple, and the little General appeared on a balcony and "made a very appropriate and gracious speech" to the crowd which solidly filled the street. On Wednesday the bride and groom traveled to Philadelphia, arriving in the evening, and spending Thursday there. On Friday, the 13th (one day after President Lincoln's 54th birthday) they were in Washington.

Among the invited guests at the reception, the only journalist seems to have been a friend of the Lincolns, a Miss Lippincott, whose pen-name was Grace Greenwood. Fortunately we have her account of the affair, although it is too brief to suit us, now, and it is more of a description than a report. Here is part of it:

"The reception took place in the East room; and when, following the loud announcement, 'Mr. and Mrs. Charles Stratton,' the guests of honor entered from the corridor, and walked slowly up the long salon, to where Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln stood, to welcome them, the scene became interesting, tho a little bizarre. The pigmy 'General', at that time still rather good-looking, tho slightly blasé, wore his elegant wedding suit, and his wife, a plump but symmetrical little woman, with a bright, intelligent face, her wedding dress - the regulation white satin, with point lace, orange blossoms and pearls - while a train some two yards long swept behind her. I well remember the 'pigeon-like stateliness' with which they advanced, almost to the feet of the President, and the profound respect with which they looked up, up to his kindly face. It was pleasant to see their tall host bend, and bend, to take their little hands in his great palm, holding

Madame's with especial chariness, as tho it were a robin's egg, and he were fearful of breaking it. Yet he did not talk down to them, but made them feel from the first as tho he regarded them as real 'folks,' sensible, and knowing a good deal of the world. He presented them, very courteously and soberly, to Mrs. Lincoln, and in his compliments and congratulations there was not the slightest touch of exaggeration which a lesser man might have been tempted to make use of, for the quiet amusement of on-lookers; in fact, nothing to reveal to that shrewd little pair his keen sense of the incongruity of the scene. He was, I think most amused by the interest and curiosity of his 'little Tad,' who seemed disposed to patronize the diminutive gentleman and lady, grown up and married, yet lacking his lordly inches. When refreshments were being served, he graciously superintended his mother's kindly arrangements, by which the distinguished little folks were able to take their cake, wine and ices comfortably, off a chair.

"Later, while the bride and groom were taking a quiet promenade by themselves up and down the big drawing room, I noticed the President gazing after them with a smile of quaint humor; but in his beautiful, sorrow-shadowed eyes there was something more than amusement - a gentle, human sympathy in the apparent happiness and good-fellowship of this curious wedded pair - come to him out of fairyland."

\* \* \* \* \*

General Tom Thumb and Lady left Washington the morning after the reception, and after spending the weekend in Philadelphia, continued on to New York, and then visited their relatives in Bridgeport and Middleboro. For a few months they retired from public life; but presently they set off for Europe, with Commodore Nutt and Miss Minnie Warren in their party. The public, on both sides of the Atlantic, tried to foresee and promote another romance, between the erstwhile best man and maid of honor, but it never developed. The rumor was that the Commodore was "a fast young man," of whose conduct Miss Minnie disapproved.



Commodore Nutt died in 1881, a bachelor, aged 38 years. Minnie Warren married, in 1877, still another dwarf, known as "General Grant, Jr."; and in 1878 a baby girl was born to them, but both the mother and baby died. General and Mrs. Tom Thumb also had a baby daughter, who lived only about two and a half years.

Tom Thumb and his wife made other European tours - exactly how many is hard to determine. They visited Queen Victoria, Napoleon III and the Empress Eugenie of France, Pope Pius IX, King Victor Emmanuel of Italy, and William I, of Germany. In 1872 they made a tour of the world (again accompanied by Commodore Nutt and Minnie Warren) and their triumphs were as great in the Orient as they had been in Europe.

Except for his tiny size, Tom Thumb was a normal man - with business instincts somewhat better than average. He made a great deal of money, with which he bought a palatial home in Bridgeport, and yachts, horses, and jewels. He was reputed to be miserly in some respects, but for himself he bought good clothes and fine cigars. He died, July 15, 1883, and was buried with Masonic rites. Not long afterward, his widow married an Italian dwarf; and after a few years of travel and exhibiting, they settled down in Middleboro, conducting a store, principally for tourists. The widow of Tom Thumb, then the Countess Magri, died in Middleboro, November 25, 1919, aged 77 years. Her husband died there, October 31, 1920.

Thus ends the life-story of General Tom Thumb and those most closely associated with him during the years of his great popularity. No one will claim that he was one of President Lincoln's most important callers, but nobody can deny that he was among those most famous.

The General was not unaware of this, as is clearly indicated by one of the few letters which he wrote and

which still exist. This one, in the Theater Collection of the Harvard University Library, reads as follows:

"Congress Hall, Albany, July 22d, '47

"Respected Sir:

"In accordance with your request, I send you a little note. My travels have thus far been chiefly in England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Belgium, Spain, and a portion of the United States.

"I was born in Bridgeport, Ct., the 11 of January, 1832. I have traveled fifty thousand miles, been before more crowned heads than any other Yankee living, except my friend Mr. Barnum, and have kissed nearly Two Millions of ladies, including the Queens of England, France, Belgium and Spain.

"I read the Bible every day, and am very fond of reading the New Testament. I love my Saviour and it make me happy. I adore my Creator and know that He is good to us all. He has given me a small body, but I believe he has not contracted my heart, nor brain, nor soul. I shall praise his name evermore.

"Time compels me to make this note short like myself.

"I am, my dear sir, Truly yours,

"Charles S. Stratton,  
known as  
General Tom Thumb"

"To Rev. Dr. Sprague, Albany"

\* \* \* \* \*

There are two remarkable features about this letter. First, the fact that he was writing a pious letter to a clergyman did not restrain Tom Thumb from telling the official lie about his age. His real birthday was in 1838, not 1832. But this makes the second fact all the more remarkable. When Tom Thumb wrote this letter he was nine years old.

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# LINCOLN *Lesquicentennial Commission*

NATIONAL ARCHIVES BUILDING, Washington 25, D. C.

Study Room 147  
Library of Congress Annex  
Washington 25, D.C.

January 15, 1960

Dear Commissioner Gerald:

You might well have acquired the contents of this letter several days ago when you were here for the Commission meeting, if you had allowed yourself some visiting time. I wish that you could have stopped in for a chat.

Our files have a few references to Tom Thumb, the midget identified in your letter of December 23. We have used only a couple of them in the forthcoming "Day-by-Day" volume.

You may recall that Montgomery Blair and Gustavus Vasa Fox married the Woodbury sisters. The sister that married Fox kept a diary and it came to the Library of Congress with the Blair Family Papers. We cite it as the Virginia Woodbury Fox diary in the Blair Papers. Under date of February 13, 1863, in the diary it is recorded that Mrs. Lincoln entertains General Tom Thumb, whose name is Charles S. Stratton, and his wife, who is wearing a full bridal costume and pretty diamonds. About fifty guests were introduced to the couple. Champagne and cake were served. When the President greets Tom Thumb, Mrs. Fox remarks: "The smallest and greatest man in the nation meet." Under date of February 14, 1863, the diary contains the statement that Mrs. Montgomery Blair heard Mrs. Lincoln say to Mrs. Tom Thumb, "We small people depend very much on our brains."

In the John G. Nicolay Papers there is a letter from Nicolay to Therenia Bates dated February 15, 1863, noting that Mrs. Lincoln gave a little reception for Tom Thumb and his bride on Friday night, the 13th.

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The Washington Daily Morning Chronicle for February 14, 1863, carries the story that President and Mrs. Lincoln gave a reception for General Tom Thumb (Charles S. Stratton) and his bride of only a few days (Lavinia Warren) in the Green Room, and later in the East Room, of the White House. Many distinguished persons were present including Cabinet members, Chase, Stanton, Welles, Usher, and Postmaster General Blair. The President remarked to General Tom Thumb, "that he had thrown him (President) completely in the shade; that he (General) was now the great center of attraction."

✓ The Washington Star for February 14, 1863, has an account of Tom Thumb leaving the White House.

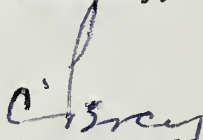
Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper dated March 7, 1863, tells the story that when Tom Thumb was introduced to the President, Mr. Lincoln asked: "Well General, what is your opinion of the war, as a military man?" The General replied: "My opinion is that my friend Barnum would settle the whole affair in a month."

The New York Herald for February 14, 1863, in reporting the reception of the 13th noted that, "Mr. Lincoln had for the time laid aside the stern cares of office and was affable and chatty, while Mrs. Lincoln's suavity of manner was the theme of general admiration."

You may or may not know that Elizabeth Keckley described the Tom Thumb reception in Behind the Scenes.

What are you going to do for the other midgets, Commodore Nutt and Commodore Foote with his sister Eliza Nestel?

Sincerely,



C. P. Powell  
Research Director

P.S. Did word reach you that mother lost the second fight against a heart attack which lasted from Thanksgiving until December 22nd?

Dr. R. Gerald McMurtry, Director  
The Lincoln National Life Foundation  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

## By Bill Moiles

SPEAKING OF entertaining in the White House, we read recently of an interesting party held there in February of 1862, during the administration of Abraham Lincoln, and, of course, during the Civil War. The affair was copiously covered by the Washington newspapers, which went into great detail about the costumes worn by the female guests, the gracious manners of those present, and even the unusual sugar ornaments on the table.

But there was a special flavor in the description sent in a letter by John G. Nicolay, one of Lincoln's secretaries, to Miss Therena Bates—who became Mrs. Nicolay shortly after Lincoln's death in 1865.

Nicolay wrote, in part:

"Half the city is jubilant at being invited, while the other half is furious at being left out in the cold. It was a very respectable if not brilliant success. Many of the invited guests did not come, so the rooms were not at all overcrowded... Those who were here (some of them having sought and almost begged their invitations) will be forever happy in the recollection... Suffice it to say that the East Room... looked very beautiful, that the supper was magnificent, and that when it was over, by way of an interesting little finale, a couple of the servants, much moved by wrath and wine, had a jolly little knock-down in the kitchen, damaging in its effects to sundry heads and champagne bottles.

"This last is strictly entre nous."

As far as we know, Therena really did keep it to herself; but Nicolay's daughter, Helen, wrote a biography of her father many years later and included the letter.

If there should be any brawling below stairs in the Kennedy household, we trust it will be handled with equal discretion.

Incidentally, in the early days of the Lincoln administration, helpful hints sent over to the White House from the State Department included this one:

"Parties if given, must be entirely informal or accidental."

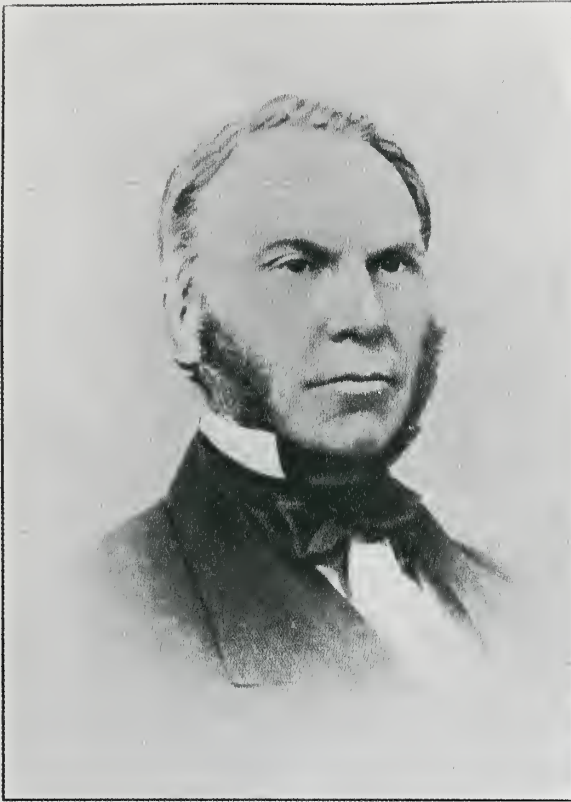
As a practical matter, though, it turned out that it was not much easier to throw an "accidental" party in the White House in Lincoln's day than it is in the time of John F. Kennedy. It just isn't that kind of place.

LINCOLN ENTHUSIASTS, by the way, should not miss the February issue of *The American Home*, wherein may be found a comprehensive descriptive article on the only home Lincoln ever owned—the one at Eighth and Jackson streets in Springfield, Ill. There are photographs and a floor plan.

And happy Lincoln's Birthday!

A-358 [CIVIL WAR]. BULL, GIDEON J. N.Y. businessman. ALS, 4pp. 4to, Washington, July 18, 1861. To his mother, telling of attending a levee at the President's. ". . . *The famed east room is changed for the better, the ceiling being frescoed & the walls papered with a light & cheerful paper. . . .*" He had thought the whole procedure, however, "*a sham. An array of richly tho' badly dressed persons. . . .*" He adds: ". . . *I was much surprised in Mrs. Lincoln. I expected to see a pretty & a tasty woman—the newspapers said so—they told a lie—that is, in my estimation. She is small rather fat & dumpy. The expression of her face is not pleasing nor does it indicate power or energy of character. She is not at home in the 'White House' . . . The President looks better than he did—his face indicated great kindness of heart. He is exceedingly fond of jokes & humor, will drop his employments any time to listen & enjoy them. . . .*" In a postscript he mentions the advance of Union troops prior to their terrible defeat at the first Battle of Bull Run. ". . . *Gen. Scott has now opposite Washington & advancing to drive the enemy about 60,000 men, a big Army truly. The soldiers are in good spirits & will whip the rebels.*" \$40.00





From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

Rev. Phineas D. Gurley, D.D., pastor of The New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, 1854 - 1868.

### The Grand Presidential Party February 5, 1862

In early February of 1862 Mrs. Abraham Lincoln (and the President) gave a White House ball, an innovation in the social customs of first ladies.<sup>1</sup> The February 5th affair was to be the first of three "receptions by invitation" to take the place of many costly formal dinners, and to provide more sociability than was possible at the large public levees.

One Washington newspaper reporter described the event, in the sub-title of his article, as "The Gayeties of the Republican Court — The Grand Party of the White House — Gathering of Dames, Demoiselles, Diplomats, Dignitaries of State, And Army and Naval Officers — Elegant Toilettes and Brilliant Uniforms and Decorations — Generous and Hearty Hospitality at the White House, &c., &c., &c."<sup>2</sup>

The Washington *Sunday Morning Chronicle* of February 9, 1862 carried a report of the reception under the byline of a reporter called "An Idler." The title of his news story is "Inklings of Idleness."

Perhaps the most intimate behind-the-scenes account of the reception is found in excerpts from letters written by John G. Nicolay, Lincoln's private secretary, to his fiancée, Therenia Bates, who lived in Pittsfield, Illinois.<sup>3</sup> The first excerpt is from a letter dated at Washington on February 2, 1862:

"Mrs. Lincoln has determined to make an innovation in the social customs of the White House, and accordingly has issued tickets for a party of five or six hundred guests on Wednesday evening next. For years dinners and receptions have been the only "Executive" social diversion or entertainments. But from what I can learn "La Reine" has determined to abrogate dinners and institute parties in their stead. How it will work remains yet to be seen. Half the city is jubilant at being invited, while the other half is furious at being left out in the cold."

The second excerpt is from Nicolay's letter dated at Washington on February 6, 1862 (the day following the reception):

"The grand party came off last night according to program, and was altogether a very respectable if not a brilliant success. Many of the invited guests did not come, so the rooms were not at all overcrowded. Of course the ladies were all beautifully dressed, having no doubt brought all their skill and resources to a culmination for this event. A lamentable spirit of flunkeyism pervades all the higher classes of society. . . . Those who were here therefore (some of them having sought and almost begged their invitations) will be forever happy in the recollection of the favor enjoyed, because their vanity has been tickled with the thought that they have attained something which others had not. I will not attempt the labor of a detailed description of the affair. The Jenkinses of the newspapers will do that more *in extenso* than I possibly could. Suffice it to say that the East room filled with well-dressed guests looked very beautiful, that the supper was magnificent, and that when all else was over, by way of an interesting *finale* the servants (a couple of them) much moved by wrath and wine, had a jolly little knock-down in the kitchen damaging in its effects to sundry heads and champagne bottles. This last item is *entre nous*.

"I enclose one of the invitation cards to show how they were got up."

In a letter dated at Washington on February 11, 1862 Nicolay wrote Miss Bates a third letter mentioning the grand party and the illness of the "President's little boys":

"I enclose you one or two newspaper slips describing the great party of last week. Since then one of the President's little boys has been so sick as to have absorbed pretty much all his attention, and the next — the youngest, is now threatened with a similar sickness."

The Lincoln Library-Museum of the Lincoln National Life Foundation has the two original "newspaper slips" which John sent to Therenia.<sup>4</sup> Because of the interesting details of the grand ball the clipping from the Washington *Morning Chronicle* of February 9, 1862 is reprinted.

#### Inklings of Idleness

The intimation that there was to be an evening party at the White House, followed by an issue of handsomely engraved cards of invitation from "The President and Mrs. Lincoln," naturally caused a decided sensation in metropolitan society. The Union residents, who have heard their secession neighbors croak over the decadence of "good society" here, since the Gwins, Thompsons, Browns, Cobbs, and others have gone to Dixie, were delighted to find that Mrs. Lincoln was about to eclipse all the entertainments where conspirators had met at hospitable boards, and to follow the example set by the ladies of Washington, Adams, and Tyler. Some who were not invited endeavored to denounce the affair as exclusive and un-democratic, but to no avail; neither were the predictions of a few sour old non-invited maidens, that it would prove a "failure," realized. The word "fail" is not in the Lincoln dictionary, and the arrangements were all successfully carried out. It was a decided, a perfect success, and the joys of realization certainly eclipsed the delights of anticipation.

#### The White House

The cards of invitation requested the presence of the guests at nine o'clock, and soon after that hour carriages began to drive up to the White House, and stop beneath the broad portico for those within them to alight. A force of the Metropolitan police, in their new uniform, kept the curious crowd from the doorway as the guests passed in, surrendering their cards to the ushers or guard. The guests were ushered up stairs, where spacious apartments were fitted up as dressing rooms, with guardians of outer garments, who gave checks, by which their owners could reclaim them. The ladies, as they emerged from their tiring-room in the full glory of evening costume, were taken in charge by their attendant cavaliers, and escorted down stairs, to pay respects to the host and hostess.

#### The East Room

The East room, universally regarded as one of the finest State apartments in Christendom, never appeared to more advantage than it did on Wednesday evening. Newly furnished, in exquisite taste, with a monster





carpet, equal in beauty to ancient tapestry, and with an elegantly painted ceiling, this noble hall was illuminated by three large chandeliers, and its large mirrors reflected the gay and varied crowds who filled it—jewels in a rich casket.

There was no formality. President Lincoln stood nearly in the centre of the room, receiving his guests with cordial greetings, and occasionally saying a pleasant word or two to those with whom he was well acquainted. Near him stood Mrs. Lincoln, in a becoming half-mourning garb, testifying her respect for the memory of the Prince-Consort, whose son had recently been her guest, and the representative of whose nation was to be present. It was a white satin dress, with a train, deeply flowered with black lace, which was looped up at intervals with knots of black and white ribbon. Her head-dress was a floral diadem of black and white flowers, with a drooping bunch of cape myrtle, and she wore a full set of pearls, with a beautiful boquet.

#### The Parlors

The three parlors, known from the prevalent color of the paper-hangings of each as the red, the blue, and the green rooms, were ornamented for the occasion with green wreaths and with exquisite boquets of rare green-house plants.

Grouped in the blue parlor, during most of the evening, were the diplomatic corps, in the scrupulous evening dress of European gentlemen, which contrasted strangely with the frock-coats, thick boots, and ungloved hands of a few citizens of Hail Columbia. They also wore the ribbons and stars of the decorations of honor which have been bestowed on them, and it was noticed that, although their ladies were all dressed with marked elegance, especially those from the French legation, none equalled the daughter of Gen. Cass, now Madame Von Limburg, who wore a blue brocade, trimmed with rich lace.

In the red parlor, with Washington gazing down

from canvass on them, were several young couples, who were evidently, oblivious of all that was transpiring around them. Their names, Mr. Editor, you will have sooner or later, grouped under the head of marriages.

#### The Guests

The President's Cabinet was, of course, present, and Secretary Seward was ubiquitous in his attentions to the ladies of the legations, as if determined to preserve *l'intente cordiale*. Mrs. Stanton was simply yet elegantly dressed in black silk, trimmed with white ribbon, edged with black; Miss Kate Chase looked bewitchingly in white silk, with a simple bunch of jessamine as her only ornaments; Mrs. Welles wore black velvet, with lace head-dress and collar. As for the Secretaries, every one knows how they look, and need I add that those who hold the portfolios of the War and of Marine Departments wore their beards—it's a way they have.

Vice President Hamlin, with his young and attractive lady, (who was becomingly attired in pink,) had over a two-third quorum of his Upper House, although not Bright. Senators Harris, Wilson, Hale, Simmons, Sherman, Chandler, Clarke, and Browning, were accompanied by their ladies, and the Senator from New Hampshire had also with him his fascinating daughter, whose toilette is always faultless. The Border States were further represented by Senators Garret Davis, Kennedy, Pearce, and others, while Justices Clifford, Wayne and Greer, with some of their officers, testified that the Supreme Court "still lives."

Mr. Speaker Grow had not as full a house, but there were goodly delegations, and Massachusetts, in particular, was well represented by Mesdames Rice, Train, Gooch, and Thomas. Col. Lawrence, our consul-general at Florence, was present with Mrs. Lawrence, and ex-Mayor Berret, with his lady, was prominent in the crowd.

The military men were not numerous, as but few save generals commanding divisions were invited. Gen. McClellan wore his full uniform, and was accompanied by Mrs. McClellan (who wore a white satin dress, trimmed with flowers, where the flowers were looped up) and by her sister, Mrs. Marcy. General and Mrs. Marcy were also present. General McDowell and his accomplished lady were the objects of marked attention. Mrs. Buell and Miss Mason represented the gallant Kentucky commander, and Capt. Griffin, with his bride, was the admiration of the young ladies. General Fremont, in undress uniform, escorted Mrs. Fremont, who was plainly dressed in simple white, yet whose vivacious conversation sparkled more brilliantly than jewels.

General Heintzelman, the Porters, Hancock, Blenker, Hooper, Keyes, Stone, Doubleday, Casey, and Shields were there, and Young Duc de Chartres seemed well pleased with the "Republican Court," while Prince Salm Salm evidently desired a waltz, and Robert "Prince of Rails" Lincoln was gallantly attentive to the fair demoiselles.

N. P. Willis, with a dozen or so of those graceless scamps, "our own correspondents;" Cyrus McCormick, esq., the inventor; Clark Mills, the sculptor; Gardner, the photographic artist; Mrs. Don Piatt, once "Bell Smith abroad," but everywhere "at home;" Squier, the historian; and two or three governors of States, with a small sprinkling of politicians, a few upper clerks, and an ex-Congressman, constituted the chinking-in of the mass of humanity in sombre, undertaker-like broadcloth.

I had promised to say more about the ladies—or rather about their dresses—and to thus emulate the sneered-at "Jenkins," whose crinoline chronicles all read—but I can't do it. So my fair readers must imagine the East-room to have been a huge kaleidoscope, not filled with colored glass, but with a medley of bright jewels and bright eyes, (assorted colors) silks and satins, tulle and tarletane, velvet and swansdown, tiny slippers and delicate gloves, scented fans, red cheeks, (one lady had only rouged one side,) ears like curved sea-shells, uniforms and gold lace, stars and garters (of knighthood,) and other minor matters, as "citizens generally" close a procession. Imagine all this—then twirl your kaliedescope around and around



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation  
Therena Bates

A cracked ambrotype photograph from the Nicolay collection. In the files of the collection is to be found the following printed announcement: "Married in Pittsfield, Illinois, on Thursday, June 15, 1865, by Rev. Mr. Burnham, Mr. John G. Nicolay, late of Washington, D. C. to Miss Therena Bates of Pittsfield."



to martial music, and form an idea how the bright fragments fell into symmetrical patterns—then broke up, moved on, and so ever changed and varied the scene. No language can describe that shifting mosaic of beauty and gay colors, as uniforms and foreign stars—gems, laces, and illusion—like all the rainbows since the flood, were blended in confusion.

### The Supper

There was no dancing, but a supper fit for the Epicureans of old. Such was the verdict of those present, who were admitted to view the tables, after they had been fully spread with the culinary triumphs and quaint confections of Maillard, of New York. The congressional dining-room was the scene of the banquet, and on the long table was the *plateau*, on the centre of which was a vase filled and wreathed with exotics. The flanking ornaments cunningly wrought in confectionery, represented the steam-frigate Union, a hermitage, a Roman helmet with flowing plume, a pagoda, cornicopaes, with cakes or ornamental forms, creams, jellies, ices, Charlotte russe, &c., &c., elegantly gotten up. Then there were pates, game, fowl, oysters, terrapin, and a variety of substantial cheer.

After all had feasted their eyes, the doors of the supper-room were closed, and then the President and Mrs. Lincoln, followed by the Cabinet and the diplomatic corps, entered, to commence the work of demolition, and the substantial testing, or rather, tasting, of the good cheer. Afterwards came the remainder of the guests:

"In the parlor, in the parlor,  
Through the parlor onward,  
Into the banquet-hall  
Crushed seven hundred.  
Good cheer to right of them,  
Good cheer to left of them  
Good cheer in front of them,  
How the 'Verdants' wondered,  
Stupid men trod on toes,  
Tore nice young ladies' clothes,  
Into the banquet hall  
As if very hungry all  
Crushed seven hundred.  
'Give me vanilla ice!'  
'Here I have called you twice.'  
'Now champagne, and in a trice,'  
'Waiter you've blundered.'  
Flashing of spoons in air,  
Eating of salad there—  
Hungry men everywhere;  
Scrambled and thundered;  
Squeezed round by floating skirts:  
Joked with by charming flirts:  
Eating by rapid spirits:  
There, in the banquet hall,  
Lacking nothing at all,  
Supped seven hundred."

After supper the promenades were resumed, the flirtations were continued, old friends and new acquaintances chatted, and the Yankee Guelphs fraternized cordially with the Border State Ghibelines, until it was time to say that closing word of this most successful and delightful party: "Good night!"

### An Idler

*Editor's Note:* An entire chapter (VIII) of Dr. Kenneth A. Bernard's new book, *Lincoln and the Music of the Civil War*, The Caxton Printers, Ltd., Caldwell, Idaho, 1966, is devoted to the White House reception of February 5, 1862. The chapter is entitled "Will The Leader of The Band Please See Mrs. Lincoln?"

1. Miers, Earl Schenck, Editor-in-Chief, *Lincoln Day By Day—A Chronology 1809-1865*, Vol. III; 1861-1865, page 93, February 5, 1862.
2. Washington *Evening Star*, February 6, 1862.
3. John G. Nicolay married Therena Bates (1836-1885) June 15, 1865.
4. The Lincoln Library-Museum of the Lincoln National Life Foundation acquired in 1957 and 1958 many remnants of the Nicolay papers.

## Did Walt Whitman Write Eulogy Of Lincoln for Speed in 1867?

*Editor's Note:* Since this issue of *Lincoln Lore* is devoted to newspaper clippings of one sort or another, it is appropriate to include a current article from *The Louisville Times*, dated February 10, 1967, that is of considerable interest. Written by Moyra Schroeder, *Louisville Times* staff writer, the article is reprinted with the permission of the newspaper editor.

"Was Walt Whitman a ghost writer for Kentuckian James Speed?

"Did the famous American poet write a speech that Speed delivered 100 years ago in Louisville on Lincoln's birthday?

"James Speed and his brother, Joshua, were close friends of Abraham Lincoln. James served in Lincoln's Cabinet as Attorney General of the United States.

"James Speed was also a friend of Walt Whitman, who was relatively unknown in the 1860s.

"Just this week, in researching a paper for a study club project, Louisvillian Mrs. Arthur Markham came across a letter, dated Dec. 29, 1866, from James Speed in Louisville to a Washington friend, (Assistant Attorney-General Ashton). Mrs. Markham found the letter quoted in 'Solitary Singer' by Gay Wilson Allen.

"The letter reads:

"I have been appointed to make an address upon the inauguration of a beautiful marble bust of Mr. Lincoln in this city (Louisville) — and am so crowded with business that I have no time to make such preparations as I should.

"Will you see our friend Walt Whitman and ask him whether he will take my rough draft of an address and revise and finish it for me — I have a certain notion that if he has the time and is in the mood, that he can do it better than any man I know. Please let me hear from you or Mr. Whitman soon as to this matter.

"Say to Mr. Whitman that if he can comply with my request, he will greatly oblige me."

"Speed made a speech, a little more than six weeks later, according to a story in an old Frankfort newspaper. ". . . in the Academy of Music in Louisville, to a select audience, densely crowded, a large proportion being ladies. . . . Governor Bramlette presided . . . unveiled the bust which elicited the approbation of the audience as a work of art. . . . The Governor then introduced ex-Attorney General Speed, who made one of the happiest efforts of his life.

"His eulogy was appropriate, impressive and, at times, sublime . . . the band played dirges at intervals. (Lincoln had been assassinated in April, 1865)."

"It is not known whether Speed's 'happiest efforts' were words written by Whitman, but maybe . . .

"According to subsequent reports, the marble bust was moved to the custom house building, was rediscovered in 1945, and moved to the J. B. Speed Art Museum, where it is now.

"The sculptor was Col. A. P. Henry, a native of Woodford County. He worked on the bust in a special room at the White House, set aside for the purpose."

The Lincoln Library-Museum has a fine copy of Speed's eulogy which appears as an eight page pamphlet with the following cover and title page: *Oration of James Speed Upon The Inauguration Of The Bust of Abraham Lincoln, At Louisville, Ky., February 12, 1867, Louisville: Bradley & Gilbert, Corner Third and Green Street. 1867.* This rare publication is listed in the *Monaghan Bibliography* as Number 894.

The Foundation staff has carefully read Speed's oration of 1867 (and compared it with an earlier and later pamphlet by the same author) with the hope that snatches of Walt Whitman's literary genius might be revealed. With the exception of a few purple passages, (some of which Speed used again in his 1887 address), nothing resembling Whitman's work is revealed. Reluctantly we have concluded that the former Attorney General wrote his own Lincoln speeches.

For further information concerning the Lincoln bust by Albert P. Henry, consult Robert L. Kincaid's article, "Forgotten Bust of Lincoln," *Lincoln Herald*, Vol. XLV, February 1943, No. 1, pages 16-19, 25.

Lincoln picture, 7¼x5½ (1906). Translation from M990.

## XII. (Abraham Lincoln) Finnish. O1379, M3861

Wrappers 8¼x5¼, 354p. Translated from M3849.

### ETIQUETTE IN THE WHITE HOUSE

The John G. Nicolay collection of manuscripts in the Library-Museum of the Lincoln National Life Foundation has among its many interesting documents a "memorandum from the State Department laying down rules of etiquette" for the Lincoln Administration.

The cardinal rule, because it comes first, is to the effect that the President must "never say 'sir' in addressing a titled foreigner."

Nicolay's rather rough and incomplete notes, based on the State Department's memorandum, follow:

#### Calls

The Private Secretary represents (the President) in acknowledging social courtesies by return and other calls.

#### Official Calls

On Senate, House, Sup. Court & etc.

#### On Diplomatic Corps

Style of card

#### No. of Cards left

One card for each member of family in Society.

Mark no card at private house except to designate a stranger or one not member of the family.

#### Folded

Turn over corner when left in person.

Send only to hotels.

#### Receptions

Ordinarily when given

Beginning first Tuesday in January and alternating with Secretary of State to end of March.

#### Special

As military

Official reception on New Years

11 to 11½ the Diplomatic Corps

11½ to 12 Judges of Supreme Court

11¾ to officers of Army and Navy

from 12 to 2 general reception

#### Diplomatic

At the Diplomatic reception the cabinet & their families form part of President's family

#### Official

No other regular reception for Diplomatic Corps

At informal evening calls of Diplomats it is well for the President to go down.

At Saturday receptions the President ought to go down.

#### Parties

Parties if given must be entirely informal or accidental.

#### Calls

As the President accepts no invitations to dine or to parties (only in exceptional cases) he is at liberty to make social visits or calls when and where he pleases.

#### Dinners

Cabinet

Diplomatic

Senatorial

Representative

Supreme Court

Heads of Bureaus ought to be invited occasionally. Citizens of Washington ought to be invited now and then.

May be given during the spring when the crowds are away.

Visiting strangers ought to be invited — May be mixed in at official dinners.

#### Military and Naval

Sometimes given invitations.

#### When Issued

For dinner, invitations should be issued one week before.

See to getting answer

#### Form of Answer required

As soon as possible

#### Additions

May send additional invitations up to within two

days of dinner & verbally after.

#### How Addressed

Cards should be addressed to the lady of the house when there is one

[The hour for state dinners was 7]

#### Dress for gentlemen

Coat

Black Dress

Blue Dress bright buttons

(Never wear frocks)

Pants

Black — white in Summer

Vest

Black

Shirt

.....

Gloves

White or straw kids

Boots

Boots or shoes

Cravat

White

#### New Years Receptions

Many details

Note: The Speaker & Vice President are not invited formally but admitted in case of their own accord see fit to come

### THE WIT AND WISDOM OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Nobody appreciated the wisdom of laughter more fully than Abraham Lincoln. His peculiar genius for utilizing the funny story to illustrate a point, or to sway others to his way of thinking, is widely recognized. It would be expected, therefore, that in a library such as we have at the Lincoln National Life Foundation, which contains over ten thousand books and pamphlets dealing with the life of Abraham Lincoln, there would be a considerable number devoted to his wit and his wisdom. Each year we would normally expect to add a few more items in this category, and this would certainly astonish no one. What is surprising is that within a period of nineteen months we have added to our collection four publications with identical titles: *The Wit and Wisdom of Abraham Lincoln*. These range in size from a miniature brochure measuring 3¼ by 2½ inches and containing 60 pages, to an 8¼ by 5½ inch book of 265 pages.

The book, by H. Jack Lang, was first published in 1941, with additional printings in 1942, 1943, 1944, 1946 and 1965. The brochures are compiled by Hallmark Cards, Inc., Pyramid Books and the Fleming H. Revell Company.

A fifth publication recently added to our library bears the title *Abraham Lincoln, Wisdom & Wit*. This brochure of 61 pages is compiled by Louise Bachelder. Like those mentioned above, it is comprised of excerpts from Lincoln's speeches, letters and other writings.

Still another publication with similar title, *Abraham Lincoln — A Digest of the Wit and Wisdom of Abraham Lincoln* by King V. Hostick was released in 1958 and added to our library in 1962.

Ruth Higgins

### NOTICE

#### Lincoln Lore Index 1 - 1500

About November 1, 1967 there will be available for sale a *Lincoln Lore Index* extending from the first copy issued April 15, 1929 to the fifteen hundredth copy issued in February, 1963. The index will be a 56 page publication in offset printing of green ink and will measure 11"x8½", the identical measurements of *Lincoln Lore*. The index will be in three divisions; namely, titles, subjects and persons.

The price of the index will be \$2.00. All orders will be handled through the Lincoln National Life Foundation.





Reproduced from a steel engraving in the collection of John Brosnan.

#### RECEPTION IN THE EAST ROOM OF THE WHITE HOUSE, IN 1865

General and Mrs. Grant are being presented to the President and Mrs. Lincoln. Vice-President Johnson, Admiral Farragut and Secretary Stanton are also in the central group. Other distinguished persons are to be seen, from left to right, as follows: Secretary Seward, General Burnside, General Sherman, General Hancock, General Halleck, General Butler, General Banks, Governor Curtin, General Meade, General Sheridan, Senator Sumner, and Secretary Welles.



PRESIDENT LINCOLN'S GRAND RECEPTION AT THE WHITE HOUSE 1865

